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SUBJECT: Abyei Border Demarcation Committee Facing Hurdles; Will Not Meet Deadline

REF: Khartoum 862

1. (SBU) Summary: Poloff met with members of the Abyei Border Demarcation Committee on September 7 and again on September 12 to introduce a U.S. demarcation expert tasked with providing technical assistance to the Committee, and to discuss the Committee's needs and readiness. Committee members in attendance expressed readiness, but significant technical and political hurdles exist. It is near certain that the initial deadline to complete demarcation will be missed by a wide margin. End Summary.

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Difficulty Meeting NCP Committee Members  
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2. (SBU) The six member Abyei Border Demarcation Committee was formed by Presidential decree on August 27 to implement points of agreement signed by the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) and National Congress Party (NCP) on August 14. The Committee was given thirty days to demarcate the boundary of Abyei as described by the July 22 ruling of the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague (Ref). At the request of U.S. Special Envoy for Sudan, Scott Gratton, demarcation expert John Gates met with Deputy Chair Kuwal Beyong (SPLM) and Committee members Ring Kuol Arop (SPLM) and Valentino Molweev (SPLM) on September 7. The three NCP members of the Committee, including the Chair, were not available to meet Gates during the week of September 7, despite numerous requests by U.S. Embassy staff in the days prior to and after the September 7 meeting. Committee Chair, Abdel Rahman Adel Wahab, refused to meet without direction from the Presidency. U.S. Embassy staff contacted more senior government officials, and on September 12 Gates met with two of the Committee's NCP members.

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Committee's Technical Ability Weak  
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3. (SBU) Deputy Chair Beyong stated that he has no experience demarcating boundaries, while the two other SPLM members are engineers with experience setting boundaries for residential property. When discussing whether a line of longitude on the ground needs to curve to account for the curvature of the earth, Committee members at the September 7 meeting initially disagreed with Gates' advice that a curved line is required. They ultimately left the question unresolved. At the September 12 meeting, the NCP members of the Committee stated that they had experience demarcating Sudan's state boundaries. After the September 12 meeting, Gates assessed the technical capability of the NCP members as weak, but better than that of the SPLM members.

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Demarcation To Start at Heglig Oil Field  
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14. (SBU) Deputy Chair Beyong said the Committee planned to fly to the facilities at Heglig oil field on September 10 to begin their work. Beyong stated that the plan was to fly around the proposed boundary in a United Nations Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) helicopter on September 11 and begin demarcation a day or two later. Beyong was not concerned that, in the past, UNMIS helicopters had not been allowed to land at Heglig, stating that in this instance it had been arranged and would not be a problem. Regarding the suggestion that Abyei town or Kadugli might be a better base from which to receive support from UNMIS, Beyong replied that the demarcation team will not have a base, instead remaining in mobile tent camps. He added that the 60 person demarcation team, aside from the Committee members, had already left for Heglig.

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Boundary To Be Marked in Concrete, Steel  
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15. (SBU) Beyong told Gates that the Committee was considering marking the border by clearing a path with a bulldozer, but acknowledged that this could create concern in the local communities. He said the Committee was not wedded to this idea. He stated that physical demarcation of the boundary will consist of one concrete pillar every 10 kilometers and one steel post every kilometer. He stated that the materials had already been procured, and that the Committee has all the equipment that it needs. Beyong said that the SPLM members of the Committee want the pillars to be placed with an accuracy of within two millimeters, and that the posts should have an accuracy of within two centimeters. Gates noted that this would be a stricter demarcation standard than that used for any other border on which he had worked. When asked how

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the team would travel along the border to do their work during the current rainy season, Beyong agreed it would be very difficult, but indicated he was hopeful of being given access to track vehicles by someone, perhaps Greater Nile Oil Company. (Note: The rainy season in Abyei ends in October, but mud remains until the end of November, making vehicular travel impracticable. End Note.)

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NCP Members Acknowledge Deadline Will Not Be Met  
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16. (SBU) The September 12 meeting was attended by Committee members Mohamed El-Nour Yagoub (NCP) and Bakhiat Mohamed Musa (NCP), as well as Dr. Mohamed El Mukhtar Hassan (NCP) from the office of the Presidency. Although expected, the Chair of the Committee never arrived at the meeting. Dr. Hassan stated that the oversight committee called for in the points of agreement was unnecessary, as demarcation disputes could be submitted to the Presidency. The Committee members from the NCP stated that they would fly to Heglig on September 14 or 15 and start work soon after. Dr. Hassan acknowledged that half of the thirty days allocated for demarcation had already passed. He did not dispute Gates' assertion that demarcation would necessarily continue well into 2010.

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Concerns About Misseriya Reaction to Demarcation  
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17. (SBU) Dr. Hassan expressed concern about the intention of the SPLM members of the Committee to place a steel post every one kilometer along the boundary. He said that placing a post every kilometer will create tension with the Misseriya, who would view it as the first step to creating a border fence. He said that if this plan is implemented, he expects that the Misseriya will gather and obstruct the work. When asked by Poloff about security arrangements for the demarcation team, Dr. Hassan stated that security would be provided by forces from the Joint Integrated Unit in Abyei. He rejected the idea of UNMIS providing security.

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UNMIS Demarcation Expert Anticipates Delays  
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18. (SBU) UNMIS border demarcation expert Sokol Kondi met with Gates and Poloff on September 7. Kondi and Gates agreed that the most the demarcation team can reasonably hope to achieve prior to the Misseriya's annual migration is an air reconnaissance of the proposed border and the insertion of the two northern pillars of the border via helicopter. Mr. Kondi said that UNMIS is willing and able to provide security for the operation, but that he was not aware of such a request. He said UNMIS had already agreed to dedicate a helicopter for a month and to provide two trucks and some cars in Abyei town. He said UNMIS had also provided satellite maps of the proposed boundary to the Committee. (Note: Committee members in both meetings told Poloff that they had not received any maps, were not aware of any vehicles provided by UNMIS, and did not intend to use Abyei as a base of operations. End Note.) Kondi expressed doubt that the Committee already had the materials and equipment needed. Kondi said the Misseriya do not want the demarcation to start before December, when they will have migrated into Abyei, and that the Presidency was under pressure to delay starting until then.

19. (SBU) Comment: Demarcation of the Abyei boundary will be technically challenging given the remote location and seasonal impassibility. These meetings also raise concern as to the organizational and technical ability of the Committee. The greatest hurdles, however, appear to be political. The NCP and SPLM members of the Committee do not appear to have a coordinated approach. The political sensitivity of Abyei to the northern and southern governments, and their constituents, the Misseriya and Ngok Dinka, respectively, threatens to make the demarcation process difficult and contentious, and bodes ill for the much larger task of demarcating the North/South border. End Comment.

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